

## The anthropology of extraction: critical perspectives on the resource curse

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# **The Anthropology of Extraction: Critical Perspectives on the Resource Curse**

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## **Abstract**

Attempts to address the resource curse remain focussed on revenue management, seeking technical solutions to political problems over examinations of relations of power. In this paper, we provide a review of the contribution anthropological research has made over the past decade to understanding the dynamic interplay of social relations, economic interests and struggles over power at stake in the political economy of extraction. In doing so, we show how the constellation of subaltern and elite agency at work within processes of resource extraction is vital in order to confront the complexities, incompatibilities, and inequities in the exploitation of mineral resources.

## **Introduction**

Initially conceived as a counter theory to explain the failure of resource abundant low and middle-income economies to benefit from the boons of their mineral wealth (Auty 1993), the ‘the resource curse’ quickly became established as a dominant paradigm in both academic and policy arenas. The proliferation of high profile scandals involving the extractive industries over the past twenty odd years and a growing body of research into the irresponsible exploitation of people and the environment in the rush for resources, has

brought increasing scrutiny to both the opaque, unaccountable, and at times irresponsible payment of funds by transnational corporations (TNCs) seeking to exploit minerals in what are commonly classified as weak or fragile states (Shaxson 2007); and on the other side, to the unaccountable, inequitable and at times corrupt, mismanagement of resource revenues by political elites. Here, oil extraction is particularly (though not exclusively) and critically scrutinised. Due to its direct impact of oil prices on the global economy and financial markets, oil has received the lion's share of scholarly interest and policy focus in relation to resource curse debates. Conversely, mining, as opposed to oil, has historically grabbed the greater share of anthropological interest and ethnographic research. The intimate and essential connection of mineral extraction to colonial projects, has meant that mining has long occupied a significant role (whether as backdrop or centre stage) in the anthropological work tracking processes of agrarian change and social transformation, proletarianization, ecological destruction and commodification (see for example Harris 1989, Nash 1979, Taussig 1980). The practice of mining is deeply territorial, as is the kind of social authority which many mining companies exert in the localities where they operate, and it is arguably this territoriality and the ways in which it shapes the life-worlds of mineworkers and mining communities that has animated ethnographers for so long (see Carstens 2001; Gordon 1977). Anthropologists have come rather more recently to studying the politics and social economies of oil seeking to interrogate empirically the distinct kinds of petro-violence, conflict and insecurity that are commonly associated with oil extraction.

In conventional accounts of the resource curse, the 'petrodollar' has become something of a metonym for the complex of extractive and financial processes that are commonly seen to foster cultures of greed, corruption, violence and economic exploitation that erode political stability (Karl 1997; Coronil 1997). The petrodollar and petroleum elites became both a

source of concern and a subject of intense scrutiny as conflict and warlordism were identified in a number of so-called ‘undeveloped’ countries for example the role played by international oil companies in financing the Angolan civil war (Global Witness 1999), and on-going ‘petro-violence’ and social struggles in the Niger Delta (Watts 2001). Weak governance in Petro-States has thus long been exemplified as a key factor in ‘the curse’ placing unaccountable revenue payments, corruption and ‘rent-seeking’ (misappropriation of funds by elites at all levels) at the forefront of academic investigation and analysis. At the same time good governance was established as the development orthodoxy of the 1990s and 2000s; while accountability in the payment and management of resource revenues emerged as arguably the single biggest issue for extractive companies operating in fragile states and a focal point of the industry’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda<sup>1</sup>.

Two decades on and the resource curse remains the subject of intense debate no longer just within development economics (Collier and Goderis 2007, Segal 2012, Karl 1997; Ross 1999) and political economy (Beck et al 2010; Zalik 2010, Idemudia 2010) but within the disciplines of Sociology, Human Geography, and Anthropology, the last of which is the focus of this paper. Indeed, the latest millennial scramble for resources, and concomitant boom in profits on the back of surging metals prices which reached its apogee in the early 2000s, has brought fresh impetus to discussions of the resource curse, and whether this boom will provide meaningful opportunities for ‘transformative development’ (Collier 2008: 3).

Meanwhile, although the dominant focus of scholarship on this millennial scramble is minerals and energy, new frontiers are opening in the rush for resources, and with them new areas of enquiry open into the pursuit and plunder of plant and animal life from microscopic genes to land itself (Thompson 2008; Fairhead et al 2012). This frontier is of course also not

entirely new. What is new is the sophisticated legal and scientific apparatus that is being deployed to normalise and institutionalise this extension of the scramble into the most microscopic domains of nature, or, as Thompson puts it, the attempt to ‘patent life’ (Thompson 2008: 318).

At the heart of debates about the resource curse then, and attempts to address it, lie persistent questions about the relationship between extractive TNCs, governments of resource rich countries, and the local populations (or stakeholders) who live and work in the territories of extractive operations. The failures of governance, representation and legitimacy that are widely held up as both symptoms and underlying causes of the curse have pushed many analysts to move away from a focus on the role of the state, to questions of *global* governance, and transnational ethical regimes which are seen variously as transcending, bypassing or usurping the authority of the state. In the wake of a catalogue of scandals surrounding allegations of the irresponsible exploitation of people and resources through the past century, those very same companies have emerged today as champions of sustainable development through business, in the vanguard of the corporate responsibility movement<sup>2</sup>. Yet the portfolio of environmental and social infraction has given way to a decade of initiatives, codes, agreements and tools aimed at making the industry not only socially responsible, but ‘sustainable’, perhaps an oxymoronic promise considering the inherently unsustainable nature of extraction (Kirsch 2009).

As the orthodoxy of sustainable development has gathered momentum over the past decade, it has recruited support from an extensive and diverse constellation of actors, establishing TNCs as the potential solution to the resource curse, rather than the cause; as purveyors of

best practice and stewards of good growth, where states, often described in terms of chronic incapacity or corrupt rapacity, have failed. Development policy-makers (see e.g. DFID 2009) and analysts alike have embraced this movement as the dawn of a new era in which not only the great financial resources of corporations, but also the spirit of enterprise and competition, are brought to bear on stemming the tide of the resource curse and harnessing the profits of the millennial mineral boom for sustainable development. As Collier predicts for Africa's mineral boom:

There is now global concern with the perils of misused resource revenues....civil society activism, allied with the new sense of corporate responsibility, has led to the creation of two new international organisations concerned with the governance of resource revenues: the Kimberley Process and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative...the new scramble for Africa, between rising Asia and the OECD countries carries risks....But it is more likely to be a force for good (Collier 2008: 6-7).

Yet, while some, such as Collier, portend a more optimistic future where increasingly sophisticated tools of good governance and corporate responsibility reverse the resource curse to turn mineral wealth into sustainable growth (Collier 2008; Hicks 2015), sceptics highlight patterns of continuity and the enduring legacy of extraction, exploitation and empire-building (Southall and Melber 2008; Carmody 2011).

While some of the key actors have changed, they argue, mineral investment in much of the Global South remains characterized by processes of neo-imperialism and dispossession, compounded by the effects of hyper-liberalisation which have left workers and citizens even more exposed to the ravages of the volatile global market as exemplified in the devastating social and ecological effects of half a century of boom and bust on Zambia's Copperbelt and

the enduring yet elusive 'expectation of modernity' (Ferguson 2001). The overriding picture that emerges, they argue, is that local populations (and particularly the poor) continue to lose out and in most cases have been adversely affected by it (Melber 2009).

Meanwhile ethnographers continue to document cases of countries and communities benighted by 'the curse', of conflict, dispossession, and of course resistance and the many forms it takes (e.g. Zalik 2004, Sawyer 2004). The promotion of 'good governance' through CSR and accountability measures was certainly a step in the right direction towards 'best practice'. But even with multiple voices and institutional level interventions the absence of 'a cure' remains palpable. After two decades of debate, action and interaction, never has it been more obvious that major gaps continue to prevail in our understanding of 'the curse'.

This, we argue, is where anthropologists have made important strides. Not in providing the 'social detail' to fill the gaps left empty by the resource curse theory, but in reconfiguring the approach to understanding resource extraction in order to effectively address it (Weszkalnys 2011). Indeed, the enduring phrase of Max Gluckman and the Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists – *continuity and change* – implicitly underwrites or animates much of the renewed academic interest and debate surrounding the resource curse and the social, ecological and political-economic dynamics of mineral extraction in the new millennium.

Thus Prichard, for example, argues that the *new* scramble for African minerals should be viewed as part of older persistent cycles of capital investment and mineral extraction in Africa since early colonial exploration (Prichard 2009). Likewise Lee, in her study of Europe-Africa trade relations, contends that the apparently progressive shift towards reciprocity, equality and a focus on poverty reduction, in fact perpetuates the ties of

dependency, domination and under-development through ‘a new partition of the continent reminiscent of the nineteenth century scramble’ (Lee 2009: 84). The question of south-south partnership has become a major focus of this often rather polarised debate, with Chinese and Indian investors in energy and minerals either lauded as mutual partners in the optimistic promise of south-south development (Collier 2008; Kopinski and Polus 2011; Taylor 2006), or demonised as the new scramblers, driven by a purely mercenary ‘hunt to satisfy resource needs that are vital to its industrialisation’ (Naidoo 2009: 134; see for example Alden 2005; Large 2008; Serge and Beuret 2009; Wenran 2009). This rather binary scheme of continuity and disjuncture in the scholarship on the resource curse has arguably privileged continuity to the neglect of the dynamic social forces that both shape and are shaped by these multiple and diverse encounters.

Crucially of course, the ‘scramble’ is neither wholly new, nor a replay of the past. It is neither the dawn of a bold new era of business-led development superseding state impotence and failures of the aid industry, nor merely ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Melber 2007), as new entrants on the extractive landscape reinvigorate century-old forms of imperial domination, compradore co-option and ultimately the dispossession of the poorest. At the same time, the current orthodoxies of good governance and economic empowerment (the latest in progressive development discourse) cannot be seen merely as smokescreens for the imperial endeavours and mercenary pursuit of resources. Where ‘change’ enters the analysis, it tends to be at the more abstract level, emphasising that the ‘new scramble’ is the product of a neoliberal order, as distinct from the colonial capitalism of the earlier scramble. This is certainly a valid starting point, but without greater empirical grounding as to what this means in context it becomes difficult to see beyond the headline narrative: the rapacious logic of capital penetrating greenfield territories, extracting resources and compelling consent across



continents. This makes it hard to get a handle on *how*, as Satgar puts it, the neoliberal project is ‘indigenised’ (Satgar 2009: 36), normalised and embedded in local realities and everyday practices of resource extraction.

The danger here lies in presenting a somewhat agentless picture of economic investment, political negotiation and resource extraction, leaving us asking, who are the powerful actors driving and enabling this new scramble? What relationships are being forged? What novel forms of elite-pacting, collaboration or co-option are being harnessed to facilitate these processes? And what diverse constellation of actors, agendas and interests constitute resource ‘partnerships’?

It is precisely at this disjuncture, we argue, that anthropology enters debates on the resource curse, both in its historical legacies and its current trajectories, in confronting head on the question of agency. Here, the ethnographic interest in agency is not only or chiefly concerned with the agency of subaltern or marginalised actors (as is commonly assumed to be the province of anthropology), but with the elite agencies of the powerful actors and institutions driving processes of mineral investment and extraction.

This is about examining the relationship between resources and development and how they are understood and articulated at the local level, it is about questioning the assumptive basis and a unilinear teleology of the resource curse theory (and of ‘development’ more generally). It is at once a critique and an exposé where historical knowledge combines with ethnographic detail to identify and understand ‘the curse’ as a problem manifest on a global scale – from the United States (see De Muzio 2010) to the Persian Gulf (see Gilberthorpe et al 2014) to the tiny state of São Tomé and Príncipe (see Wieszkalnys 2011).

In the following sections we consider the contributions made by anthropologists over the past decade. These we group into the three interconnected areas we see as key to the contributions made by anthropologists in studying the resource curse and extractive industry more broadly. In the first section, we consider the issue of agency as a key focus of ethnographic engagement with the resource curse. In particular we review recent shifts in ethnographic methodology that enable a more nuanced and multifaceted enquiry into the constellation of agencies – elite as well as subaltern – at work in sustaining the resource curse discipline. A new ethnographic focus on the agency of corporate and state actors within neoliberal processes of extraction sets out to re-embed our understanding of the resource curse within social relations and thereby combat the fetishisation of capital which continues within much of the literature on the resource curse.

The second section looks in more detail at this work of re-embedding extractive processes in social relations. Here, we explore how anthropologists have drawn on the core conceptual canon of the discipline – on theories of kinship and hierarchy, reciprocity and exchange not commonly associated with the extractive industrial complex – to understand the social relations that shape and are shaped by resource extraction. This of course seems jarring, as extractive industries are so often conceived as purely or primarily technical enterprises, hard-edged and divorced from the intricate tissue of kinship ties and moral relations. In doing so the anthropology of extraction shows how global flows of resource capital unsettle, entrench or generate new forms of dependence, patronage and clientelism locally. At the same time, it brings to the fore local conceptions of wealth, accumulation, resource and ecology which tend to be overlooked in applications of resource curse theory. We see that far from being mere contextual detail, the social and historical specificities challenge the abstract theory of

the resource curse and the teleological vision of modernisation and development that underpins it, demanding better, more refined conceptual tools of analysis that are both more nuanced and more progressive in their capacity to incorporate the lifeworlds and epistemologies of those affected by mining.

This is not just an intellectual project. It becomes the foundation of what we see to be the third and final feature of the anthropology of extraction: politically engaged research – the critical branch of anthropological thought that not only challenges the epistemological foundations of the resource curse, but critically reconsiders the modes of intervention it generates and the extent to which they confront (or eschew) the structural issues at stake. At base, what defines the anthropological perspectives on the resource curse, we argue, is a primary focus on relations of power, both at the local and global level. In this final section then, we turn to anthropological engagement with the initiatives, policies and techniques deployed to address the resource curse. Premised on reductionist models of global-local that attempt to provide technical solutions to political problems of entrenched inequalities and struggles over power, they can serve instead to reproduce the very same conflicts they set out to address by undermining local and minority struggles for autonomy and economic enfranchisement.

### **Ethnography and the Question of Agency**

Since June Nash's iconic *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1979) and well before, the discipline of Anthropology has been interested in extractive processes, seeking to understand how those who live or work in the shadow of mines confront the extractive complexes that transform their lifeworlds; and how they negotiate or contest the economic, social, ecological

and not least moral orders in which extractive capitalist developments are embedded (Gordon 1977; Nash 1979; Taussig 1980; Banks and Ballard 2003).

Through long-term in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, held up as the cornerstone of the discipline, anthropologists have explored subaltern experiences of corporate incursion and mineral extraction, and the ways in which meanings of the resource curse itself are resisted or re-appropriated, mutating and morphing across geographies as they are embedded in different localities. They have done so initially from those subject to the ravages of the resource curse, rather than the actors and institutions implicated in its perpetuation, or in the architecture of an ethical regime charged with stemming its tide.

However the anthropology of extraction has undergone an important shift in recent years that we want to reflect on in this paper. While traditional ethnography, which prioritises long-term engagement with a particular site, has enabled anthropologists to take the long view of on the ground realities to see how lifeworlds and subjectivities are transformed by the coming of mines and energy projects (see for example Kirsch 2014; Golub 2014; Gardner 2012; Gilberthorpe 2013; Li 2010; Sawyer 2004), advances in multi-sited ethnography have enabled other anthropologists to track the transnational flows and corporate practices of the resource extraction across diverse geographies (see for example Appel 2015; Rajak 2011a; Sydow 2016; Gilbert 2015; Welker 2009;).

In the past, this methodological commitment to the local and the disciplinary preoccupation with the agency of the subaltern (or the lack of it) led to the representation of corporations as monolithic vehicles of capital driven by an unstoppable logic of maximisation, rather than as the focus of ethnographic interest in themselves. While anthropologists continue to focus on

local experiences of and engagements with mining and energy ventures (see for example Gardner 2012; Gilberthorpe 2013; Li 2010; Sawyer 2004); others have turned to the apparatus and elite agency of extractive companies (and their financiers) themselves that engage with 'the community' in processes of extraction in often complex relationships of entanglement and disentanglement (Appel 2012; Gilbert 2015; Kirsch 2014; Rajak 2011a; Welker 2009). This involves exploring the new millennial 'scramble' for resources from the perspective of the 'scramblers' (and how these processes are enabled and/or resisted by local political frameworks), as well as investigating the situated social and political transformations they are bringing to the lives and strategies of those caught in their wake, however socially, legally and politically removed they may be from it. In particular, multi-sited ethnographic methodology has shed light on the connections between the localised experience and understandings of the resource curse among those at the 'coalface' of extraction and the elite processes of strategy, policy-making and capital investment in the 'boardrooms' of extractive enterprises. Crucially, we stress, that while ethnographers have traditionally focused on the agency (or lack thereof) of the 'powerless', and on the ways local populations affected by and implicated in resource extraction nevertheless find modes of resistance, one of the most significant contributions of anthropology to debates about the resource curse has been bringing into focus the agency of the powerful.

Weszkalnys (2010) highlights the performative power of resource economics, and the ways in which international experts and economists deploy theories of the resource curse to explain why countries fail to enjoy the boons of mineral wealth. Crucially, she argues, anthropologists should analyse how these theories shape (rather than reflect) the real world of mineral extraction. But we can go further than this. The field of resource economics (just like economic theory more broadly) is intimately connected to corporate strategy and corporate

interests, two mutually sustaining arenas of knowledge and practice, symbolically encapsulated in the BP Chair and Centre for the Analysis of Resource-Rich Economies at Oxford University, set up with a \$14 million endowment from BP. In 'studying up', anthropologists have turned the ethnographic lens on (or up) to the corridors of power, to disentangle the agency of various actors within elite coalitions that have served to endow TNCs with moral authority and the responsibility to ensure good governance and the honest payment of revenues. The contribution of anthropology to problematising the 'resource curse' lies as much in illuminating the powerful agency within the forces of extraction, and the instruments, apparatus and partnerships which sustain corporate power, as it does with the experience of those who become subject to them.

Meanwhile, another recent field of enquiry further pushes the boundaries of the analysis of agency in the politics of resource exploitation, by locating the agency (or 'potentialities' as it is dubbed) of resources themselves, and examining how the specificities of the resource itself, i.e. its material agency, provides a source of power (Weszkalnys and Richardson 2014). According to this approach, which takes its lead from actor-network theory, it is the qualities of oil itself, for example, (both its intrinsic material properties and its cultural constructions in local and in global commodity flows) that endow it with a power to convene actors, knowledge, technologies and of course capital, to create particular configurations (or assemblages) of people and things in diverse localities, which in turn give rise to particular patterns, flows and expectations (Weszkalnys 2014). Equally, for miners in Jessica Rolston's study of Wyoming's Powder River Basin, it is the unpredictable seams of the crumbling coalface itself that has an awe-inspiring and menacing agency that seems to outwit or outplay managerial codes of health and safety, laying bare the hubris of human ambitions to tame the coalface. Corporate codes of responsibility which (cl)aim to make environments safer

become instead instruments to discipline the workforce, while the coalface remains untameable (Rolston 2014).

This interest in the materiality of resources is connected to a concern for the spatiality of extraction – and the kinds of social relations and economic flows it generates and impedes – directing attention to the particular historical evolutions and divergences across sectors in modes of extractions (Ferguson 2005; Appel 2012; Berhrends et al 2013). James Ferguson, for example, contrasts the mineral and oil enclaves that he argues characterise neoliberal modes of extraction across Sub-Saharan Africa today with the all-encompassing social projects of a former paternalistic era of mining on the continent that oversaw the construction of whole company towns and the colonisation of all social life (Ferguson 2005). In this neoliberal order of resource enclaving, mining, he contends, has come increasingly to resemble offshore oil production, physically isolated and contained by technical security apparatus, and socially and economically divorced from the national grid (Ferguson 2005). Yet in doing so, he himself replicates the very tendency to expunge from view the mobility of people and the intricate web of social relations and material transactions that transgress these boundaries, revealing their very permeability despite state-of-the art security systems, as Appel's work shows (Appel 2012; 2015). In these accounts, the state is defined as much by its absence as its presence, appearing as thin or even 'hollowed out' (Bridge 2010; Ferguson 2006). Meanwhile neoliberal processes of production and extraction are represented, as Duffy puts it, as being all 'about dispersing power away from geographically defined nation states' (Duffy 2006: 93). Here then, while Ferguson echoes an assumption underpinning much of the critical scholarship on the resource curse – that extractive companies, particularly within the energy sector, increasingly bypass the state through local enclaving (Ferguson 2005) or partnership with non-state actors (Gardner 2012) – Appel confronts it (Appel 2012). Thus

Appel examines the complex web of partnerships, separations and mobilities that have emerged around Equatorial Guinea's offshore oil industry. Appel argues that new power arrangements are mobilised through opposing and distinctive types of infrastructure (corporate and local) that foster and sustain the appearance of separation. This 'infrastructural violence', she argues, reinforces racial hierarchies and inequities on the one hand and the power of extractive companies ('old guard' paternalism) on the other. This political act of abstraction, she argues, has allowed the company to dissociate themselves from the resource curse by positioning themselves as the benevolent agent, and placing its cause and effect firmly in the hands of the State (Appel 2012; 2015).

This recent turn in the anthropology of natural resources and political ecology has sought to bring TNCs and the state back into the picture. This work explores how the state enters, facilitates, mediates or brokers the exploitation of natural resources. This is a dialectical process, demanding that we ask not only how TNCs negotiate the state, but how the state, in turn shapes the corporate form, not only in its formal role as regulator or majority shareholder, but in the more intangible, yet nevertheless important, dimension of shaping corporate identity and cultures of social responsibility, which may invoke national rootedness alongside their assertion of global corporate citizenship (see also Welker's study of an American company in Indonesia (2014), and Rajak's (2014) discussion of the 'proudly South African' claims of Anglo American).

Extractive TNCs emerge from this empirical body of work as simultaneously rooted in the local sites of their operations and home countries, yet at the same time defined by networks of connection, personnel and processes that are distributed across a transnational scale.



This directs our attention to the kinds of social, moral and cultural practices employed by extractive companies in pursuit of legitimacy, authenticity and, ultimately, the consent or acquiescence of local communities to their presence. In this vein, Rogers has shown how oil production in the Perm region of post-Soviet Russia is enmeshed in the production of cultural capital, sealing the material and moral bond between the industrial and the cultural life of the community in the corporate quest for authenticity by the country's oil and gas giants (Rogers 2012: 285). In South Africa, as in Perm, the (pre)history of mineral deposits comes to stand for the deep historical presence (and dominance) of the mining industry, naturalising the bond between mining and the nation, and the country's extractive giants and society (Rajak 2014).

The resources (whether social, cultural, political or moral) and agencies that corporate actors draw on to achieve their goals are equally embedded and diffused rather than centralised in say the London headquarters of a mining company. Thus Welker (2009) draws our attention to local brokerage (and corporatisation) as a vital means through which extractive companies secure access to resources. What emerges potently from this kind of ethnographic approach that sets out to break down the crude scales of multinational versus village community is, once again, the centrality of actors. And more specifically still, the agency of local actors in facilitating, and brokering the processes of capital investment and the kinds of corporate power they convey. This kind of agency and the forms of governmentality it enables is similarly a key ethnographic target of Michael Watts' work in the Niger Delta<sup>1</sup>, which reveals the precarious agency of local and national elites whose conflicting yet interwoven interests and struggles over the material and immaterial gains that flow from oil sustain the resource curse as an economy in itself (Watts 2008). In doing so, it confounds any crude dichotomy of 'good versus evil' that can underscore much of the polarised and polemic discourse on the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Watts is a geographer who uses anthropological methods to conduct in-depth social analyses

resource curse pitting the interests of ‘communities’ against ‘capital’ (Knudsen 2014: 85). This attention to the elite agencies at work in reproducing and sustaining the resource curse, raises a key empirical question: to what extent are these dominant corporate configurations negotiated, contested, reshaped and re-scripted by local forces in practice; how does the exercise of local agency act upon and reshape the extractive corporations and states themselves?

### **Teleologies of Extraction: Re-embedding Extraction in Social Relations**

Processes of extraction are commonly seen to be defined by geological determinants, technological constituents and the economic imperatives of productivity and profit. As a result, the process of resource extraction is often mirrored by an analytical abstraction by which models of resource economics are abstracted from the social politics and power relations which drive them. This analytical abstraction not only mirrors the physical extraction of resources from their social environments, but reflects the spatial enclaving which increasingly defines extractive operations, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ferguson 2005; Appel 2012; 2015).

By placing the social relations of extraction front and centre, anthropological approaches set out to counter-balance the depersonalisation that has dominated accounts of the political economy of resource extraction. At the same time, we suggest, it is driven by an implicit (and at times explicit) political intention to counter a myopic industry gaze which divorces the modes of production from the delicate tissue of social relations. The myriad social bonds, dependencies and forces which corporate discourse relegates to the categories of ‘externalities’ can be seen as potent expressions of what Comaroff and Comaroff describe as

a broader imperative within neoliberal capitalism for abstraction, in this severing of the workforce, recast as ‘human capital’ ‘from its human context’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 305).

The anthropology of extraction approaches this project of re-embedding by bringing its own conceptual toolkit or apparatus to bear on exploring the evolving dynamics of extractive processes as embedded *social* processes of *continuity and change*. This involves, applying anthropological tropes such as kinship, gift and reciprocity as heuristic devices to analyse *how* resource extraction generates and reshapes social relations between corporate actors, state officials, and their wider ‘stakeholders’ (to borrow from corporate jargon), and to investigate how the economies of extraction create new domains for the exercise of power, and new struggles over authority, at the micro-level as much as the macro.

The anthropology of oil is a potent example of this. Commonly viewed as a world apart from affective relations, the oil industry is generally seen as determined by the demands of industrialisation and an asocial logic of accumulation – that it is capital, not kinship, shareholder value not sentiment that holds sway (Sawyer 2005; Gledhill 2013). Where social relations enter the picture, they do so as externalities which pose risks to production that must be managed. But recent ethnographic work has revealed how oil production is intimately bound up with (and in fact dependent on) various forms of moral economy. Thus in the oil fields of Argentina, for example, Shever shows us kinship sodalities at work in and intrinsic to the process of oil privatisation. Shever is concerned with the generative power of affect, how it shapes and produces business and the economy, transgressing prescribed boundaries between ‘affective desires and economic goals’ (Shever 2012: 19). Similarly, Gilberthorpe shows how the technologies of CSR in the oil operations of Papua New Guinea serve to

‘objectify social relations, abstracting them from the rules of kinship... and exchange that ensure social and economic security’ (Gilberthorpe 2013). In all cases, kinship, or kin-like relations are shown to be a resource that is exploited in the process of natural resource development and extraction, yet leaves the targets of corporate policies weaker.

The abstraction of resource economies from social relations has the broader unintended effect of creating a kind of exceptionalism, which marks out resource abundant states as exceptional and defined in essence by their mineral wealth. Political structures, economic relations, and environmental landscape are all seen to be pre-determined and explained by a geological destiny. This dark destiny – or doomed teleology of negative progress – as scripted in the development discourse of the resource curse feeds into a common narrative of expectations of modernity, to borrow Ferguson’s phrase, turned to decades of betrayal and disappointment (Ferguson 2001).

Grounded ethnographic work has begun to reveal the productive, discursive capacity of the resource curse to reshape local economies, social relations and politics to its own theory, driving expectations in its wake. In this way anthropologists have explored how both resource investments, and the partnership agreements and development deals in which they are framed, produce dominant discourses of progress, growth and economic sovereignty which are internalised as popular imaginaries and aspirations of opportunity, mobility, economic empowerment and connection (Ferguson 2001; Gardner 2012; Sillitoe and Wilson 2001; Rajak 2011a; Wieszkalnys 2014; Sydow 2016). Whether expectations of a job, a chance to grab a piece of the local economy expanding on the back of prospective mineral operations, to win a tender in the supply chain, or the hope of patronage, and the trickle down of benefits from corporate social investment, or the even more vague, yet no less alluring

hope of entrepreneurial opportunity, for many these aspirations will remain tantalisingly out of reach (Weszkalnys 2014; Rajak 2011a).

The foreclosure of such hope emerges as a potent theme across diverse ethnographic studies chronicling how dreams of broad-based development give way to exclusionary benefits, aspirations of inclusion are met with enhanced inequalities and even dispossession of opportunity (Dolan and Rajak nd), and connection becomes disconnection (Gardner 2012; Appel 2012).

This is particularly the case in contexts of resource extraction where resource investments (extant and extinct), once pitted as ‘development’ in exchange for inevitable ecological devastation, social fragmentation and geographical displacement, have left a trail of resentment and subsequent hostility and conflict. Resentment within communities whose hopes and expectations have been dashed is as palpable in Sawyer’s *Crude Chronicles* from Ecuador (2004), as it is in Kirsch’s account of *Mining Capitalism* from Papua New Guinea (2014), Langton and Mazel’s ethnography of mining in Australia (2008), and Watts’ study of the Niger Delta (2001; 2008).

A key question then for the ethnography of extraction is how resource abundance and its flip side, the resource curse, are conceptualised by people who are subject to the prospective or on-going processes of extraction (see for example Kirsch 2006; Gilberthorpe and Banks 2012). The resource curse paradigm itself represents a new ‘discourse of development’ that, like discourses (or paradigms) of progress before it conveys particular normative values, imposing particular conceptions of success and failure. As models travel, they are themselves productive of social relations – and the resource curse, conveyed through the global instruments of good governance, as much as the extractive processes they are intended to

govern, do precisely this (Weszkalnys 2010, Killian 2015, Behrends et al 2014). Good governance as the magic bullet to the resource curse has, as Sanders and West write of ‘transparency’ (a related concept), ‘become endowed with symbolic power’ as it ‘travel(s) the globe conveying notions fundamental to the operative logic of globalizing economic and political institutions’ (Sanders and West 2003: 10). Tracking the discursive practices and normative values that attend the flows of mineral resources and capital, from multiple positions across the geographical and social places in which TNCs operate – as well as at different points in a vertical hierarchy – illuminates the pervasive and productive power of the ‘resource curse’ as a set of knowledge practices in itself to shape local realities and reinvent the authority of global corporate power through ethical regimes.

Taken together, this body of work collectively highlights how development orthodoxies are themselves productive of popular expectations. The twin paradigms of good-growth and resource curse are no exception to this – as they are internalised, animating individual aspirations and, in turn, haunting the sense of failed or deferred expectations that mirror the broader failures of the developmental state to translate mineral wealth into good growth and economic sovereignty. Watts’ work on the Niger Delta is particularly poignant here (Watts 2001; 2008). Watts has examined in detail the plight of the Ogoni who have lived and toiled amidst the pipelines that transport the products (and profits) of extraction away from their locale, bringing immense gains for Royal Dutch Shell, significant resource rents to the Nigerian State, and scant returns to the Ogoni for the dispossession of land and livelihoods. This of course remains the commonplace outcome for many indigenous groups in their confrontations with extractive investments across the world. As does the alienation that comes from the manifest disjuncture between embedded local cosmologies and epistemologies of resources and their wider ecology, and externally imposed neoliberal

ideologies of extraction, land and nature. A key challenge then becomes the imperative for indigenous minorities and local groups to articulate and translate their cultural norms, values and philosophies of the environment in ways that are deemed to 'fit' dominant neoliberal narratives of resource use, development and progress/modernity (see Trigger 1987).

This epistemological dissonance, and the attendant challenge of translation, emerges similarly as a theme in Golub's ethnography of gold mining in Papua New Guinea (2014), however with quite contrasting outcomes. Chronicling Ipili narratives of resource development around the Porgera mine, Golub shows us:

Just as the gold in a mountain requires refining if it is to take a form suitable for circulation in national and international financial markets, so too the identities of the Ipili people had to be refined and transformed in order to circulate in the national and international arenas of law, policy, and ideas that accompany and buttress transnational capitalism (Golub 2014: 19).

While industrial extraction has been far from smooth for the Ipili (see also Filer 1999; Biersack 2006) a combination of factors, including Papua New Guinea's more recent colonial history, their political links with Australia, and the state's recognition of indigenous landowners, means that their relationship with mineral wealth sits in stark contrast to that of the Ogoni.

Collectively, these works emphasise how resource environments are both historically defined and externally configured. The crucial point to be made here is that the process of re-embedding analyses of the resource curse in the social relations and politics of extraction, serves equally to re-embed them in particular histories and colonial legacies. This enables us to make sense of specific social struggles and political economic trajectories that shape

current patterns of resource extraction. Centuries of land use, access and territorial demarcation as well as local and regional structures of hierarchy and power are the result of a multitude of factors at the local, regional, national (such as colonialism, slavery) and global (globalisation, liberalisation) level. As these ethnographic studies show us, extractive industries are *inserted into* existing structures of power and interaction that ultimately breed different outcomes. As Watts argues, Nigeria's history of early colonial violence shaped the interethnic relations that are now habitually reinforced by the state. And yet the peculiarities of history are not part of the resource curse theory. The assumption of a single resource development paradigm to which the theory can be applied is perhaps the biggest flaw in the theory that ethnographic research continues to challenge. The ethnographic engagement with resource extraction, as Golub's *Leviathans at the Gold Mine* demonstrates, highlights the necessity of historicising the resource curse and its effects if we want to even begin to consider its future trajectories.

Based on this reconfiguration, anthropologists stress that the resource curse is not a peculiarity of low or even middle income countries, highlighting the presence of the various characteristics taken to be symptoms of the resource curse in high-income countries such as Australia, the US, Canada, Scotland, Norway, Finland, Russia, and the Gulf (see for example Rolston 2014; Szeman 2014; Brotherstone 2012; Overland and Kutschera 2012, Cumbers 2012; McNeish and Logan 2012; Coumans 2011; Lawrence 2007; Langton and Mazel 2008; Rogers 2012; Gilberthorpe et al 2014). What these studies underline is that 'the curse' is not solely driven by economics. Rather, they argue, it should be understood as a confluence of social and political-economic processes including:: the commodification of land, economic and social dependence on a non-renewable and environmentally-damaging energy source, persistent social and geographical inequities in infrastructure and development

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benefits financed by the nation's mineral wealth, and health and safety concerns around new forms of mineral and energy extraction to which recent debates and protests around fracking in particular have brought renewed attention (Willow and Wylie 2014; Szeman 2013).

Here, ethnographic accounts contest the dominant geographies that underpin conventional assumptions about the resource curse – and the north-south binary according to which they continue to be ordered. In so doing, they aim equally to destabilise the association of liberal governance, good growth and the positive exploitation of resources on the one side, and weak governance, wasted opportunity and the mismanagement of resource wealth on the other. For it is not only the dominant spatial configurations which commonly inform discussions of the resource curse that anthropological approaches question, but the teleological narratives of investment, extraction and progress that underwrite development paradigms of resource governance. This is exemplified in Stammmler's study of reindeer pastoralists in northwest Siberia where they have, he recounts, coexisted peacefully with extractive industries despite the steady encroachment of oil and gas extraction over the past 40 years (Stammmler 2013). Here, persistent socialist values (including superiority of state over individual interests) and a powerfully unifying Russian post-Soviet identity (inculcated in part by state ideology) provide both security and an inoculation or insulation from the kinds of conflict and struggles over resources that are commonly held up to typify the resource curse. Thus Stammmler shows us how, counter to the discourse of liberal governance (as the pre-requisite for preventing or mitigating the perils of the resource curse), it is in fact the legacy of Soviet control and planning that has kept the curse at bay in northwest Siberia. What might appear as an anachronistic or even nostalgic persistence of Soviet values and ideology shaping the politics of extraction in Siberia offers a counter narrative that unsettles the dominant teleologies of modernisation, liberalisation and growth that underpin conventional resource curse theory.

At the same time, Stammmler makes clear that ‘peaceful coexistence’ (Stammmler 2013: 261) does not translate to national or cultural homogeneity on the one hand, or individual wellbeing on the other. Land grabbing for extractive infrastructure may be unchallenged, but it provokes a type of internal, personal conflict rather than an externalised one that is conducive to the phenomenon of a ‘resource curse’ (Stammmler 2013: 243). Stammmler’s case study represents a factionalism that decries any homogeneity of interests that is as much a condition of the resource curse phenomenon in northwest Siberia as it is in the Niger Delta. State ideology and state politics thus emerge as intrinsic to local level action, an outcome also seen as an effect of neoliberalism in Latin America (see for example Gledhill 2013). The widespread indigenous notion of ‘good living’ across South America (for example, *sumak kawsay* for the Quechua of Ecuador) is one example of how state politics fosters the nationalisation and politicisation of culture (see e.g. Warnars and Bebbington 2014).

Narratives of failed ‘resource developments’ are of course not confined to the so-called ‘Global South’. As Di Muzio argues (2010) the resource curse is as much a US as a Nigerian phenomenon. We argue that the effects of ‘the curse’ (the collateral damage) are more conspicuous in contexts with an indigenous minority where uneven development is strikingly manifest. Langton and Mazel (2008) demonstrate this in Australia’s Pilbara, a region that has been exploited for its minerals for over 70 years. In their case study of the Pilbara, Langton and Mazel argue that improved CSR and the introduction of Native Title Agreements in the 1990s has done little to improve living standards in indigenous regions, and has contributed little to providing better participation and decision making amongst Aboriginal communities (see also Martin et al 2014). Despite this, constrained by the entrenched geographic prescriptions common to resource curse theory, Langton and Mazel state that the Australian

case study is *not* an example of the (economically defined) ‘resource curse’ theory. Instead, Australia, like Canada, Botswana, and Norway, is described as a ‘growth *winner*’ (Mehlum et al 2006) and thus not a victim of ‘the curse’. Like many high and middle income countries, Australia is defeated by the narrow limitations of the resource curse theory. ‘Collateral damage’ (Watts 2013: 54) here is tangible. Indeed, Langton and Mazel’s empirical account in itself contests the categories of ‘growth winners’ (and by extension ‘losers’), and the crude geographies that tend to underpin them, demanding a deeper reconfiguration of the theory itself in order to better understand the full scope of its effects.

This brings to the fore broader questions surrounding the capitalisation of land and resources inherent in notions of the resource curse, and the perceived failure of states to make good on the potential of their national patrimony by maximising the return on their natural endowment. As a symbol and driver of economic development premised on a classic teleology of modernisation and progress, extractive industry thus inherits and consumes the concept of terra nullius, whereby the value of land is identified in terms of its productive capacity, while pre-colonial, indigenous or alternative stewardship of the land is ignored (Trigger 1997; Kirsch 2014). This involves a normative valuation of land and its usage that is deemed ‘underproductive’ (according to the World Bank’s own index, for example) juxtaposed with the vast complexes of natural resource exploitation held up as ‘panoramas of technical achievement’ (Trigger 1997: 165). Here the powerful teleology of progress and global integration is held up as the antithesis to the resource curse to validate or provide moral authentication to the project of development through industrial expansion. In challenging this teleology, ethnography can be seen as a political project, attempting to bring to light alternative panoramas of development, emic visions of economic self-determination or

indigenous ecologies which may reject the very commodification of nature as a 'resource' in the first place.

For this reason, Kirsch eschews the concept of 'the resource curse' altogether, burdened as it is with normative values that may not correspond with those who live in areas affected by extractive industries. He speaks instead of 'colliding ecologies' bringing sharply into focus the clash between indigenous conceptions of and relationships to nature and the social and environmental effects of large-scale extractive projects (Kirsch 2014: 15). This ethnographic approach refocuses analysis on the micro-economic and social costs of extraction, that are disproportionately shouldered by those living in the vicinity of operations, but which are not amenable to the macro-economic measurements of resource economists and are therefore rarely included in discussions of the resource curse: the incalculable experience of loss, dispossession, destruction of the fragile tissue of human relations, alienation from one's landscape and 'impoverishment by pollution'. Kirsch captures this dystopian industrial reality viscerally, implicitly asking the question – can this really be the acceptable cost of extraction?

The new landscape downstream from the Ok Tedi mine is alien to the people living there. Rivers that once ran green and clear have been transformed into muddy torrents the color of coffee with milk. Three decades of mining have transformed the verdant landscape along the river corridor into a moonscape of gray tailings (Kirsch 2014: 16).

From Kirsch's long term ethnographic engagement with those living in the shadow of the Ok Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea, to Sawyer's study of oil exploitation in Ecuador, the capacity of the resource curse as a dominant development paradigm to marginalise or even

silence alternative ecologies, conflicting ontologies of the environment and nature, not to mention wealth and the shibboleth of progress, emerges powerfully as a common thread linking ethnographies of extraction across diverse geographies. As an intellectual project, which is driven by a political (and arguably ethical) commitment to subaltern representation, ethnography applies emic categories in order to challenge or reconfigure the epistemological foundations of the resource curse.

Putting social relations at the forefront of both approaches to and analyses of the resource curse is then both an intellectual and political enterprise. Watts' politically engaged ethnography of petro-violence in the Niger Delta makes this point clearly. He confronts the extent of fatalities suffered by the Ogoni, perhaps the most wretched effect of the resource curse, chalked up in the industry as the cost of doing business in areas of 'weak governance' and instability or, as he puts it: 'the collateral damage associated with producing and moving vast quantities of oil' (Watts 2013: 54). This effect, indisputable in the oil sector, but also tangible across the wider extractives sector, is difficult to quantify. As such it rarely forms part of the discourse on resource developments. Ethnographic research, as Watts' work forcefully attests, brings the collateral damage into sharp focus to illustrate the very real, human impacts of 'the curse', and as such is a political project as well as an intellectual one, contesting the corporate discourse of risk management to place these so-called 'externalities' front and centre in the debate about the legitimacy (and morality) of operating in contexts of on-going and violent conflict, rather than the products of extraction and the apparent revenues they yield.

### **The Politics of Engagement: Technical Solutions to Political Problems**

As Paul Collier notes, ‘there is now global concern with the perils of misused resource revenues’ (Collier 2008: 6). The outcome has been a raft of voluntary agreements and instruments which constituted the rapidly emerging ethical regime targeting the effects of the resource curse at the global level, which national governments had failed to regulate. A movement which, led by NGOs, began with the aim of exposing and demanding an end to mismanagement and corruption in resource exploitation, has shifted to a focus on the corruption and mismanagement of resources and revenues by Southern governments at the expense of their people, over whom this coalition of corporations, NGOs and development bilateral extends their collective guardianship formally authenticated through multi-stakeholder partnerships, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative aimed at ensuring accountability in the payment and expenditure of revenues from resource exploitation. Such global instruments of government which claim a capacity for de-contextualisation, abstraction and re-contextualisation in diverse local realities, hold out the persuasive promise of a collective societal responsibility governed by voluntary global regimes of accountability. They extend the compelling vision of disparate parties with formerly divergent interests – corporations, NGOs, even trade unions – brought together in a collaborative venture for the collective goal of sustainable development. The novel partnerships that have emerged in this era of CSR and global governance do indeed, at times, appear to have achieved a shift from combat to collaboration (Rajak 2011b).

At the same time, in an effort to address the developmental failures of national partnerships from whom they obtain the legal licence to operate, to deliver the consent of the people, extractive industries (and their representative bodies such as the ICMM) have looked both to the global arena and local level in pursuit of other sources of legitimacy. The failures of accountability, and even more fundamentally legitimacy that are seen to be at the root of the

resource curse, have led to the elusive quest for the 'social licence to operate'. This is encapsulated in the statement of the former CEO of Shell and Chairman of Anglo American:

Any major company will seek to command the consent of the people who live in the vicinity of a new mine since the price to pay reputationally and through delays and disruption, for riding rough shod over local opinion is a high one (Moody-Stuart 2006: 24)

The social licence thus emerges as an essential component not simply to the ethics of extractive operations but to their very survival. As Welker puts it 'corporate security begins in the community' (Welker 2009: 142). 'This isn't a grand philanthropic gesture', the former chairman of Rio Tinto and Barrack Gold commented, 'I don't see it as my responsibility to spend shareholder money on grand philanthropic gestures, it's actually how we build security for long-term business investment. It makes the company a much more attractive partner to a host government or host community'<sup>2</sup>. The quest for the social or moral licence as it is sometimes dubbed, is concretely materialised in tick-box models such as the ICMM's 'Community Development Toolkit' or Anglo American's SEAT which aim to take all stakeholders (or their representatives recognised by the company) into account while maintaining a replicable model of resource-based development. As such, they require that heterogeneous social contexts are distilled into generic models of local community made up of sets of stakeholders whose needs, once understood, can be addressed through strategies of CSR and local socioeconomic development.

Building on the much longer history of anthropology of development, a growing field of ethnographic enquiry has emerged which aims to subject the instruments of this global ethical

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Robert Wilson, Interview 19<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

regime – and the actual practices they produce – to empirical investigation. In bringing a critical lens to the much-heralded win-win-win that conceptions of global corporate citizenship invoke – not only of people, planet and profit, but of local responsiveness, national alignment and global values – anthropologists have set out to examine what lies behind claims to consensus around the orthodoxies of sustainable development, good governance and corporate responsibility, and demonstrating how such multi-stakeholder processes of ethical governance can equally be liable to corporate capture (Garsten and Jacobsson 2007, Kirsch and Benson 2010, Rajak 2011b; Gilberthorpe and Banks 2012). Broadly speaking, this work examines corporate efforts to mitigate the impacts of extraction from two vantage points, on the one hand focusing on the apparatus and architecture of the corporate form (see for example Rajak 2011a, Kirsch 2014, Welker 2014), and on the other exploring how it is experienced at the local level (see for example Sawyer 2004, Shever 2012, Gardner 2012, Li 2010, Gilberthorpe 2013).

Across various extractive sites (Newmont's mining concessions in Ghana and Peru, Chevron's gasfields in Bangladesh and the Chad-Cameroon pipeline) this embryonic field of ethnographic research reveals how corporations deploy CSR in pursuit of local compliance, collaboration and consent (Sydow 2016, Gardner 2012, and Muñoz and Burnham 2016). In each case however, CSR produces division and disconnection as much, if not more than, cohesion and inclusion. For as Kapelus (2002), Sydow (2016) and Sawyer (2005) all show in ethnographic research from contexts as diverse as gold mining in Ghana, titanium mining in South Africa and oil drilling in Ecuador, the 'local community' does not already exist as an objectively observable (and unified) unit to be identified and approached in pursuit of consent or a 'social licence'. The processes of identification and social investment are discursive in that the community is itself imagined and constructed through these normative processes, and



a particular constituency is created in order to provide the operation with legitimacy and the local accountability that national resource deals fail to deliver. Indeed anthropologists themselves have traditionally been favoured by mining companies looking to deploy their knowledge and methods of participant observation (and the proximity to ‘the people’ they claim) in the process of identification of and mediation with the so-called ‘community’ (Kapelus 2002; Kirsch 2002). Crucial here is the ‘anti-political’ effect of community engagement and investment apparatus as a set of uniform technologies imposed to discipline diverse localities and social contexts to corporate agendas (Sydow 2016). Yet, as Sydow notes, this is not always the case. Her comparative analysis of Newmont Mining’s CSR programmes in Peru and Ghana reveals that CSR’s capacity to suspend politics is contingent, implicated in local resistances and agency (Sydow 2016).

Indeed, as Sillitoe and Wilson’s (2003) work at the Porgera Mine in Papua New Guinea brings into sharp focus, the consent that is brokered through these processes of community engagement and investment are fragile and the security that is achieved is precarious. For in seeking technical solutions to political problems through increasingly sophisticated tools of social impact assessment and engagement, they often serve to further entrench existing patterns of inequality and exclusion, through the dispensation of benefits that are narrowly targeted and inevitably exclusionary (Rajak 2011a; Sawyer 2006; Sydow 2016). Thus it is the unintended outcomes of such CSR interventions which such work brings to the fore: the creation of hotspots of development enhancing geographic inequalities, new forms of corporate patronage compounding existing hierarchies and divisions which might pit one group against another and the potential for undermining local struggles for entitlement, rights and control over resources (see for example, Killian 2015, Rajak 2011a, Kirsch 2014, Welker 2014; Gilberthorpe and Banks 2012).

Both the global instruments of governance and the local content programming have, in various ways, sought to mitigate, or bypass, the state as the key arbiter of socioeconomic benefits and development derived from mineral wealth. As a result, however, they are unable to address the fundamental and more intractable issues at stake in the resource curse i.e. questions about economic sovereignty, national patrimony and who owns (and gets to benefit from) mineral resources. Ethnographic research reveals how such technical interventions for treating or managing the resource curse at either the global level or local end can have unintended outcomes. Ultimately the techniques of CSR and local engagement which are intended to address the local cause and effects of the resource curse, can end up working as instruments of divide and rule that serve to enhance inequities and hierarchies in resource rich areas, deferring the fundamental questions about ownership of resources and beneficiation, rather than addressing them. For while the social licence to extract attempts to circumvent the deficit of legitimacy underlying the licence to operate agreed by national governments, it fails to address the underlying question of who has the right to benefit from the process.

Far from offering progressive tools to combat the curse, such initiatives and instruments can have the opposite effect. From the oilfields of Ecuador, to the goldmines of Papua New Guinea this strand of critically-engaged anthropology collectively highlights how corporations use the language and practice of ethics to contain and respond to different kinds of challenges and conflicts generated by their activities, from ecological/environmental crisis, to labour rights and local expectations of jobs, from dependency and Dutch disease to corruption and conflict over resources (Welker 2014, Kirsch 2011, Rajak 2011a, Sydow 2016). As CSR serves to better ease the incursion of TNCs and the extraction of local resources (Sawyer 2007: 7), corporate-community partnerships can provide new

channels/vehicles for patronage, elite-acting/corruption, dependency and control (Welker 2009, Rajak 2011a, Jones 2007, Gardner 2012). By exploring both the intended and unintended effects of these processes *empirically*, this body of work shows how, in practice, the very same instruments that are proffered as solutions to the resource curse have a productive power to reinscribe relations of authority and dependence between both extractive companies and national governments, as well as development donors, and the localities in which they operate.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this article we have argued that the anthropology of the resource curse should be seen more broadly as a process of recontextualising the study of resource extraction in the social relations in which it is embedded. We have suggested that the ethnography of mineral extractive more broadly should be viewed as a process of humanizing what are so often conceived as chiefly technocratic or economic enterprises, hard-edged and divorced from the intricate tissue of kinship ties and moral relations. Analysing a multinational mining company in terms of personhood, oil exploration in relation to kinship, or corporate social responsibility in relation to gift exchange, might at first seem surprising, even jarring. Yet, as the ethnographic contributions that we have brought together in this review highlight, the intricate understanding of human relations, on which the ethnographic research focuses,

reveals not only the constellation of both subaltern and elite agency at work within processes of resource extraction, but the ways in which they entrench, unsettle or generate new forms of inequality, friction and dispossession in resource curse affected areas.

Crucial to this process of social re-embedding is both a historical and geographical re-contextualisation which prioritises the temporal and spatial specificities of the local and national contexts in which extraction takes place as key to understanding its effects. Rather than seeing these specificities as background or “social detail” that elaborate or add flesh to the universally applicable model of the resource curse, we suggest that the intrinsic embeddedness of mineral extraction (literally rooted in the ground) requires that we invert that logic, and start, as it were from the ground up.

Part and parcel of this project of recontextualisation is the emphasis on historicising mineral extraction, and the patterns commonly associated with the resource curse. Technical knowledge and economic theory, in any sphere, are commonly held up as timeless and universal (despite being only the best knowledge of their own particular age). Throughout this paper we have returned to the anthropological adage continuity and change as shorthand for the imperative to study resource extractive at all levels – from illegal gem mining in Madagascar to oil futures trading in London – as historically contingent. The result is to highlight how the Curse, and the specific adverse effects and destructive practices of resource extraction that have become so entrenched and pervasive are anything but the inevitable outcomes of immutable structures. Thus a fundamental element in the anthropology of resource extraction, we argued, has therefore been an emphasis on agency, to bring agency back into the picture at both the micro and macro level, and counter an agentless portrait of

global resource capitalism that is reproduced as much by its critics as by the mainstream technocratic approach to resource extraction.

As such, ethnographic accounts of mineral, oil and gas extraction serve to challenge stereotypical renditions of global capitalism as a unilinear process of colonisation of greenfield territories across the globe, and contest the common portrait of indigenous communities as powerless, passive recipients. At the same time, extractive TNCs are often cast in the critical literature as simply the foot soldiers of neoliberalism, driven purely by the unyielding ‘logic of capital’ grinding out its path as it seeks to colonise greenfield territories across the globe (Behrends et al 2013; Sawyer 2005). Such renditions of global resource capitalism, in failing to examine empirically the specific elite agencies that drive and broker processes of extraction, displace agency (and indeed causation) onto ‘capital’ itself.

In providing an alternative template for confronting *empirically* transnational processes of extractive capitalism from multiple angles, the mobility and flexibility of anthropological research brings into focus the connections (and disjunctures) between the articulation of the resource curse as a globally applicable paradigm and the situated practices to which it is seen to give rise in particular localities. The role and contribution of anthropology is then, neither restricted to the revelation of localised difference to the ways in which the resource curse is experienced and contested, nor limited to showing how and where extractive processes have failed because of a deficit of local knowledge or a gap in cultural understanding on behalf of operators and/or the state.

This we argue has been, and remains, a political as well as intellectual project, providing a lens for examining empirically how agency drives and brokers processes of extraction at

numerous levels, for tracing routes of causation as much as intended and unintended outcomes. The critical focus on social and historical specificity challenge the abstract theory of the resource curse and the teleological vision of modernisation and development that underpins it, demanding better, more refined conceptual tools of analysis that are both more nuanced and more progressive in their capacity to incorporate the lifeworlds and epistemologies of those affected by extractive industry.

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<sup>1</sup> This is encapsulated in the statement of the former chairman of Anglo American and Shell to shareholders in 2006: 'The revenues that we generate are often volatile ... and extractive revenues have sometimes been subject to wholesale embezzlement by government.... Whilst we cannot and should not take on responsibilities that are properly those of governments, we cannot stand aloof from major governance and social issues in the countries where we operate' (Mark Moody-Stuart, Anglo American Annual General Meeting 25 April 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Illegal uranium mining in Namibia (Rio Tinto); co-architects of South Africa's labour repressive apartheid economy (Anglo American); complicity in the oppression of the Ogoni in Nigeria and the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa (Shell); complicity with paramilitary outfits in forced relocations in Columbia (BP); environmental

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disaster at Brent Spar (Shell again); involvement in the mine-related conflict on Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (Conzinc Rio Tinto); asbestos poisoning in the Cape (Cape Industries); ChevronTexaco in Angola; Talisman in Sudan ... the list goes on.